THE ECONOMIST
12 February 1977

Appointments

Drawing fire

Washington, DC

Time, morality and the Vietnam war have shrunk and fragmented the elite group available to ensure a smooth foreign policy transition from one administration to the next. Survivors from the old regime like the new secretary of state, Mr Cyrus Vance, the new secretary of defence, Mr Harold Brown, and the new presidential assistant for national security affairs, Mr Zbigniew Brzezinski, are naturally fetching in some fellow-survivors of the establishment; but, from political necessity as well as sheer depletion of manpower, they are also bringing in young dissenters, bright men, full of push but devoid of experience, in the hope that they will settle down.

First, however, most of them have to be confirmed in their jobs by the senate. Their past utterances are being combed through for dangers or discrepancies. It is a rare nominee that has not contributed articles to Foreign Policy or Foreign Affairs; roughly speaking, the more circumspect and uninformative the article, the less trouble it gives a nominee when his public hearing comes up.

Mr Paul Warnke, whom President Carter has picked as the new head of the arms control and disarmament agency, was as taciturn as anybody when he was high in the defence and foreign policy establishment under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Since then, in private law practice, he has contributed some of the livelier articles to the quarterlies and has given refreshing lectures on defence policy at many a congressional hearing. This may hurt him. Now he needs the senators' votes, he has critics with ample material to dissect and bring up against him.

This week Mr Paul Nitze, one of Mr Warnke's old Democratic colleagues in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations but older than he and more devoted to a hard defence line, sent the chairman of the senate foreign affairs committee, Senator Sparkman, a letter attacking Mr Warnke as a man not able to stand up to the Russian military experts in arms control negotiations.

The counts against Mr Warnke are his assertions on several occasions that the defence budget might be cut. He has also held the quantities of nuclear weapons available to each of the superpowers to be unimportant in themselves, provided that a rough strategic parity of assured destruction exists between them; and he has favoured a policy of unilateral self-restraint as a means of inducing self-restraint from the other side and thus slowing down the arms race. Such restraint has been practised before, for instance by President Kennedy, who restricted American nuclear tests to encourage negotiation of the Test Ban Agreement. The trouble for Mr Warnke is that the critics of compromise in nuclear arms policy believe, first, that the Soviet government is set on winning military superiority, and, second, that Mr Carter himself is unduly committed to a termination of the strategic armaments race.

Mr Warnke is an adroit advocate, and in the senate foreign relations committee he had, on the whole, sympathetic hearers. His friendly reception there, however, did not bring the drama of his confirmation proceedings to a close. His opponents were mobilising support in the armed services committee, in hopes of damaging his case through less sympathetic questioning by inquisitors better briefed and more directly concerned with the American side of the military balance. In the ordinary way, hearings and a report by the foreign relations committee would have sufficed, but the armed services committee was within its rights in inviting Mr Warnke to appear in its hearing room as well.

This promised Mr Warnke a harder time. If confirmed in his appointment (which he did not originally want, but the president insisted on it, as Mr Carter explained on Tuesday in his first official press conference), Mr Warnke will not in fact have great power. The critics were getting at the president, who seems to them unduly anxious to get a new strategic arms control agreement. A close vote on the Warnke confirmation would be a shot across the bows of the Carter administration.

As things have turned out, the same controversy is likely to spill over into the discussion of the merits of Mr Carter's new choice of a director of Central Intelligence to fill the gap left by Mr Sorensen's withdrawal. Late last year the Central Intelligence Agency sharply raised its estimate of what the Soviet Union was spending on defence, a change that can mean, according to one's point of view, either that the Russians have started to expand their forces at a terrifying rate, or just that the earlier estimate was too low. Debate has been racing

It won't be plain sailing for Turner

in the intelligence community and among the practitioners of strategic studies about the gravity of the Russian military threat. The next director of Central Intelligence, in his advice to the president, may have to take sides.

continued

Mr Carter's choice, Admiral Stansfield Turner, at present Nato commander-in-chief in southern Europe, has the reputation not only of a vigorous and accomplished sailor but also of a thoughtful and sophisticated naval strategist. Many might think he would be better employed running the navy than in reconstructing the battered Central Intelligence Agency, but Mr Carter is in a difficulty with the CIA and must have appealed to his old Annapolis classmate in strong terms. Picking an eminent military man is one obvious way to ride over the suspicions that undid Mr Sorensen. Admiral Turner is not, however, the conventional big-navy man that admirals generally are expected to be.

He, too, has been writing for Foreign Affairs, in the last issue of which he poured polite scorn on those who take a crude number of Soviet naval vessels, compare it with a crude number of American naval vessels, and jump to the conclusion that the Russians are on top at sea. He stated other criteria by which the adequacy of the American naval forces should be defined, criteria that included not only quality and efficiency, but ability to discharge the several tasks—strategic offence, protection of power, naval presence, sea control—that face the navy.

In doing so he dismissed as meaningless a numerical equation of Soviet submarines with American submarines, or of America's naval nuclear missile launchers with Russia's. Sea control is different, and this, it seemed to emerge from his article, was the naval mission closest to his heart. While Admiral Turner acknowledged the "dogged determination" with which the Soviet Union was building up its navy, he observed incidentally that in doing so the Soviet Union was "reacting to its perception of a threat from our once-overwhelming superiority at sea."

That gets him into the controversy about Soviet military ambitions. With the other controversies about the covert operations and the general propriety of CIA behaviour it has nothing to do, but it does promise an illuminating argument before Admiral Turner gets confirmed in his new, unappetising job.